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SUBJECT: NORTHERN GREEKS MAINTAIN HARD LINE ON MACEDONIAN NAME ISSUE,
EXTREME RIGHT ANNOUNCES MARCH 5 RALLY

REF: (A) ATHENS 258, (B) THESSALONIKI 13

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: 93 percent of northern Greeks favor a veto of Macedonia's NATO accession absent a mutually acceptable name. Extreme right LA.OS and other nationalists plan to hold two rallies in downtown Thessaloniki on March 5, but no one expects a repetition of the huge 1992 demonstrations on the same issue. LA.OS and Thessaloniki Metropolitan Anthimos oppose any proposal involving the name Macedonia, but some conservatives seem open to a mutually-agreed composite name. Politicians and media blame the U.S. for the current name predicament but there are no indications that next week's rallies will produce anything more than angry rhetoric and possible flag burning. An outcome to negotiations that crosses "red lines" or appears imposed by Washington could elicit a stronger reaction. END SUMMARY

FAR RIGHT, CHURCH PLAN RALLIES FOR THE NAME

12. The "name issue" remains a highly emotional one for northern Greeks, who consider themselves the "real Macedonians" and guardians against "Skopjean" irredentism. Thessaloniki-based nationalist groups have announced two separate demonstrations on the name issue on March 5. The right-wing Institute of National and Social Studies "Ion Dragoumis" will hold a rally in downtown Thessaloniki, in front of the statue of Alexander the Great. Extreme right LA.OS (Orthodox Popular Rally) president George Karatzaferis will be keynote speaker. The "Global Committee for the Macedonian Struggle" will hold a separate rally at about the same time, featuring Metropolitan Anthimos, Democratic Renaissance party leader and former MP Stelios Papathemelis and academic/journalist Costas Zouraris. While turnout is likely to be high, no one expects a repetition of the February 1992 demonstrations over the name issue, during which over a million protesters flooded downtown Thessaloniki. LA.OS has accused the organizers of the second rally of choosing the same time and date as LAOS's rally in order to undermine it and help the government.

13. The Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, Anthimos, has been the most vocal and uncompromising public figure in Greece on the name issue, opposing any use of "Macedonia" in the eventual name solution. Frequently referring to the issue in his sermons, he has urged the government to veto Macedonia's accession to NATO and the EU and advocated a referendum on the issue and the organization of mass rallies by the Church. Anthimos's activism contrasts with his superior, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos, who reportedly told reporters February 26 that the name issue is "outside the ecclesiastic ethos."

MAINSTREAM POLITICIANS OPEN TO COMPOSITE NAME, AVOID RALLIES

14. (SBU) Two of Thessaloniki's most prominent politicians, Prefect Panagiotis Psomiadis and Mayor Vassilios Papageorgopoulos, who are both from conservative governing party New Democracy and considered hardliners on the name issue, recently announced they will not attend any rallies. Psomiadis told journalists he was skeptical a rally would attract a large number of people or be effective: "I am against rallies because nowadays everything is resolved on the diplomatic table." Mayor Papageorgopoulos reportedly stated that he does not like the Nimetz proposals but "Greece cannot abstain from negotiations." Thessaloniki-based ND MPs Costas Gioulekas and Theodoros Karaoglou seem to have accepted the government's presumed "red line" of a mutually-acceptable composite name (Ref A). Karaoglou told journalists "we would obviously prefer a name without the word Macedonia in it but politics is the art of the feasible and not of the desired." Socialist PASOK and leftist politicians in the north have criticized GoG handling and U.S. pressure but also accept the concept of a composite name.

PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST COMPOSITE OR DUAL NAME SOLUTION

15. (SBU) A late February poll (to be published March 2 by local daily "Makedonia") shows that 93 percent of northern Greeks favor a veto in the absence of a mutually acceptable name. 75 percent oppose either a composite or dual name solution. Still, most citizens have taken a restrained, wait and see approach. There was almost no public reaction to the appearance of posters in Thessaloniki signed by the "Coordinating Group Against Greek Imperialism" accusing Greece of trying to reduce Macedonia to a protectorate state. Also, there have been no large rallies. Fewer than 50 people participated in a February 21 march organized in Thessaloniki by the fringe far-right group "Hrisi Avgi" (Golden Dawn) (Ref B) protesting Macedonian irredentism.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: ND politicians from the north seem to have reluctantly accepted the current GoG negotiating position, or are at least refraining from public dissent while this latest

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negotiating round unfolds. With a shaky one seat majority, however, the government has little room to maneuver without alienating its northern deputies or strengthening rival LA.OS. Politicians and media blame the U.S. for the current name predicament but there are no indications that next week's rallies will produce anything more than the usual anti-American diatribe and flag burnings. Northern Greeks might react vigorously, however, if negotiations produce an outcome that crosses "red lines" or appears imposed by Washington.
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